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Convict Criminology Prisoner Re-entry Policy Recommendations

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7. CONVICT CRIMINOLOGY: PRISONER RE-ENTRY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Introducing Convict Criminology to the Global Community

Prisons in the USA

The USA operates the largest criminal justice system in the world, with over seven million individuals currently under some form of correctional control, including imprisonment, probation and parole (Mays & Winfree, 2005; Wacquant, 2005). This involves some 2.3 million men and women doing time in the nation's prisons: a vast gulag, comprising thousands of state, federal and military facilities. Each of the 50 states has a distinct correctional system, predicated on numerous factors including its own regional history and culture. In the USA, prisoners do time in institutions operated by the federal government, by 50 separate states, and by a growing number of private corporations (Hogan & Richards, 2006). Together, the custodial world comprises an "Other America" (Harrington, 1962); a carceral nation of which the average American has only superficial understanding.

The above figures are well publicized, however, and the general public, influenced by powerful lobby groups, appears willing to ac-

cept them (Gertner, 2008; Wacquant, 2005). In fact, a trend toward greater punitiveness in sentencing seems to be part of an international trend (see, e.g., Freiberg and Gelb, 2008; Pratt et al., 2005). The consequences, of course, are obvious: billions of dollars in direct costs in addition to the millions of people damaged by incarceration, the squalid conditions inside many jails and prisons, and the breakup of families. Some members of the public insist that criminals deserve the misery they get, while others believe that prisoners receive salutary treatment that makes them safe, responsible and law-abiding citizens when released. We know that prisons are less than effective in the USA, since the recall or return to prison rate approaches the 70 percent mark (Quinn, 2003: 137-140). See the growing literature about mass incarceration and its effects (e.g., Ross & Richards, 2009). This chapter briefly reviews Convict Criminology (CC) (see Richards & Ross, 2001; Ross & Richards, 2003; Jones, et al., 2009; Ross et al., 2010), the group to which we, the authors, belong. It then focuses on our prisoner re-entry policy recommendations.

Introducing Convict Criminology

The strategy of attempting to study prisons through participant or direct observation is not new. Historically, a number of academic criminologists have conducted research inside prison walls. Unfortunately, they have rarely been able to penetrate the secrets and mysteries of the prison world itself. Why? Typically, they have entered one or a few prisons, spent a couple of hours touring under escort, interviewed a sample of staff and inmates, and then departed to examine their data and write their reports (Ross & Richards, 2003). Their research protocols have often been accompanied by methodological flaws, such as interviewing prisoners who are handcuffed or chained to chairs, or while being monitored by prison staff, security cameras and microphones. Under

these conditions, the responses of subjects are affected and their reliability is inevitably compromised.

The advantage of the work done by Convict Criminologists is that, being familiar with the social environment and politics of the prison, they are able to design research plans that accommodate the needs of both prison staff and prisoners. Equipped with advanced degrees earned either in prison or after release, returning to prison to do research holds few fears or uncertainties for them. In general, they understand the processes, they know the culture, and they can interpret hidden meanings and innuendos behind responses. Convict Criminologists are comfortable inside cell blocks alone, without escort guards, and refuse to interview prisoners in restraints. In their capacity to empathize with their subjects, they are able to collect better interviews and more reliable data.

Convict Criminology (CC) emerged in the United States in the mid-1990s (Richards & Ross, 2001, 2005, 2007; Ross & Richards, 2003; Richards, et al., 2008; Jones et al., 2009; Ross et al., 2010). CC started out of the frustrations many of us felt when reading the academic literature on crime and criminal justice. In our view, much of the published work on correctional facilities reflected the ideas of prison administrators, and largely ignored what convicts knew about the day-to-day realities of confinement. Many prison studies tended to approach the subject abstractly, or from secondary and often outdated sources, with little detail or differentiation among security levels, state or federal systems, or regional jurisdictions. Some studies were conducted without even entering a prison or interviewing prisoners. In response, former prisoners, along with some allied critical criminologists, began conducting research that reflected a more hands-on (e.g., auto-ethnographic) analysis of prison life and its aftermath.

Today we, the Convict Criminologists, work at universities across the USA and in other countries. Our work is informed by personal experience as former prisoners and/or correctional workers, along with traditional training as academics in sociology, political science, criminology, and related disciplines. The object is to educate the

public, academics, and policy makers about the realities of confinement, and the social and psychological impediments to community re-entry. Additionally, we serve as role models, mentors, and advisors for prisoners, and formerly incarcerated persons who are completing college degrees in the social sciences.

Who are the ‘Convict Criminologists’?

The Convict Criminologists are students or professors who incorporate prisoner perspectives and experience in their research and writing. This includes contributing to or building upon the Convict Criminology literature, and participation in Convict Criminology sessions at national conferences. Convict Criminology group members may be convicts, ex-convicts, or “non-convicts.” While the core members of the group are ex-convict academics, having a prison record is not a precondition for CC membership. Today the group also includes prison reform activists who have decided to join because of their research interests, their publications, or their work in the community.

Convict Criminologists conduct research that incorporates the experiences of prisoners and prison workers, in an attempt to balance the conventional representations of the mass media, academia, and government. Without this countervailing approach, the production of knowledge will disproportionately reflect the views of criminal justice administrators against the perspectives of their clients. Unchallenged and unilateral thinking undermines democratic principles and leads to misinformed policy making. While CC recognizes that criminal justice systems are essential for a healthy society, it also holds that excessively repressive law enforcement can compromise the welfare of individuals, families, communities, and ultimately the state as an independent arbiter of justice. Developing a broad, inclusive and balanced knowledge base is thus vital if we are to have crime control strategies that are humane, fair and effective.

Convict Criminologists in 2010

The CC group today is loosely organized as a voluntary writing and activist collective. There is no formal membership listing or assignment of leadership roles. Different members inspire or take responsibility for assorted functions, for example as leading author on academic articles, research proposals, or program assessments, mentoring students and junior faculty, or taking responsibility for speaking to the media. The group continues to grow as more prisoners exit prison to attend universities, hear about the group, and decide to contribute to activities. Typically, new members “come out” when they are introduced to the academic community at scholarly conferences.

Today, the former prisoners of the CC group can be roughly divided into four categories. The first consists of the more senior members, all full or associate professors, some of whom have distinguished research records. The second group consists of recent PhD recipients who are just beginning their careers. This group is just beginning to contribute to the research field. The third group is ex-convict graduate students on their way to obtaining a PhD. Among this group are men and women behind bars who already hold advanced degrees and publish academic work about crime and corrections. Some have sole or co-authored books, have written articles alone or with ‘free world’ academics, and are better published than many professors. A fourth group includes former prisoners working for community organizations while participating in CC research and publication.

In 2010, the CC group included men and women ex-con academics from Australia, Canada, Finland, New Zealand, Sweden, United Kingdom, and the United States. The US, with the largest prison population in the western world, continues to contribute the most members.

CC Prisoner Re-entry Policy Recommendations

Although Convict Criminology has accomplished a lot, we recognize that there is still much to do. To begin with, in our publications we generally make policy recommendations. Contrary to the opinions of some critics, we do not claim to have a monopoly on knowledge about jails and correctional institutions. Indeed, we borrow selectively from conservative, liberal and radical criminological/criminal justice approaches alike. With this in mind, the following sections briefly outline our CC prisoner re-entry policy recommendations. Many of these suggestions, based on years of formal and observational research, were introduced in previous publications (Richards, 1995, Richards, 1998: 2009a; Richards & Jones, 1997, 2004; Jones & Schmid, 2000; Richards & Ross, 2001; Austin et al, 2003a, 2003b; Ross & Richards, 2003; Richards et al., 2004a, 2004b; Richards, et al., 2008; Jones et al., 2009; Ross et al., 2010). The policy recommendations below are offered as a blueprint for rethinking the way prisoner release to the community is organized in the USA.

Our policy recommendations for re-entry actually start before the individual is convicted and sentenced. The reason is that it is difficult separating out pre-custody, custody, and post release policy recommendations. We know that the present re-entry programs in the USA are largely a failure. Repeatedly, prisoners are granted parole, which is only to be violated soon thereafter, and they are returned to prison for minor infractions (Ross & Richards, 2010). In order to break this cycle we need to rethink the entire incarceration process, as well as procedure for release and recall. We need to make serious and pragmatic recommendations about the changes to be implemented. The following proposals are based on what we have learned from our own personal experiences and from the many interviews we have conducted with prisoners and parolees over the past 15 years and longer.

In this chapter, we propose 12 steps towards a new direction in corrections:

1. Reduce the US prison population
2. Increase the scope and range of restorative justice programs
3. End the ‘War on Drugs’
4. Demilitarize the criminal justice system
5. End punishment packages
6. Restore voting rights to felons and prisoners
7. Close old prisons
8. Restore federally funded higher education to all prisons
9. Prepare inmates properly for release
10. Improve medical services
11. Provide more community resource centers
12. Provide more residential treatment centers

1. Reduce the US Prison Population

Approximately one in 31 American adults is under criminal justice control. Such figures disproportionately impact minority populations resulting in one in 27 Hispanics, and one in eleven Blacks under the supervision of the state. If current trends continue, one in three Black males can expect to be imprisoned in their lifetime (Pew Center, 2009). Every year over 600,000 American men and women leave prison to re-enter society.

Where imprisonment is concerned, the United States incarcerates four to five times as many citizens per head of population as other modern democracies such as Canada, England, Australia and New Zealand (Department of Corrections, 2001; Newbold & Eskridge, 2005). In large part, the prison population in the USA has grown dramatically because prisoners receive long sentences for minor crimes, including simple possession of drugs, or common assault (Miller, 1996, 10–47)—followed by long periods of community supervision after release—with strict conditions, rigorous monitoring and hair-trigger violation components. Parolees may be summarily returned to prison for breaking technical rules of supervision.

The CC group advocates dramatic reductions in the national prison population. We argue for imprisonment only as a last resort for serious crimes, where the convicted person cannot be safely supervised in the community. This can be done by recognizing that imprisonment should be reserved for only the most dangerous criminals. For example, many drug addicts could be offered community based residential drug treatment, instead of imprisonment. Violent offenders could receive shorter sentences, followed by longer terms on parole, depending upon their disposition for future violence (see Irwin, 2009, 6-15). Perhaps some of the longest sentences should be served by persons guilty of serious corporate and white-collar crimes that have resulted in serious injury or loss for many people. Most prisoners, regardless of their crimes, could become eligible for parole review after—say—three years in prison. Recall to prison should only occur after serious or repeated breaches of parole conditions. A reduction in the national prison population could be accomplished by restructuring sentence administration, and substituting many prison sentences with probation, fines, and community service.

2. Increase the Scope and Range of Restorative Justice Programs

The Convict Criminology group recommends extending restorative justice services, particularly to young and naive offenders. Restorative justice (Strang, et al., 2006; Richards, 2009: 114–120) is a process that recognizes and builds upon traditions of solving conflicts through communal communicative processes—common within indigenous populations such as those of North America, New Zealand, Australia and Israel (Zehr, 2002; 2004). Unlike modern state-oriented criminal justice processes, restorative justice focuses on the harm to individuals and the offenders' obligation to repair the damage done. Ideally, restorative justice creates a voluntary, safe, and respectful environment for the victim, the offender, and community representatives to meet, discuss issues surrounding the offending, and reach a mutually accept-

able solution (Zehr, 2002). Because restorative justice requires the willing participation of both the offender and the victim and because meetings can be difficult and expensive to organize, their practical utility is limited. Moreover, restorative justice is less suited to hardened, serious recidivists, to offenders with multiple victims, or to those convicted of ‘victimless’ crimes. They are, however, ideally suited to young first-time offenders who may not fully appreciate the personal pain that their actions have caused. Participation in restorative justice may mitigate, but should not be used to completely void, the punitive consequences of criminal actions (Daly, 2006; 2008; Maxwell, Morris & Hayes, 2006; Ministry of Justice, 1995).

3. End the War on Drugs

The US Government has lost the much-vaunted ‘War on Drugs’ (Chambliss, 1995; Miller, 1996, Austin & Irwin, 2001). Rather than ending America’s drug problem, the War on Drugs, which began in 1970, has led to an “imprisonment binge” (Austin & Irwin, 2001), with millions of men and women incarcerated, and an immense burden to taxpayers in the form of police, courts, jails, prisons, and welfare payments to inmates’ dependant families. In 1980, there were 40,000 Americans in prison or jails on drug charges. With the ongoing intensification of the War on Drugs since 1980, by 2009 the number had grown to 500,000 Americans in prison or jail on drug charges alone. In 2005, African Americans represented about 14 percent of unlawful drug users, yet they represent 34 percent of those arrested for drug offenses and 53 percent of those sentenced to prison for drug offenses (Mauer, 2009; Sheldon, 2001). We are long overdue in recognizing that the war on drugs is a flawed policy, causing more social harm through its implementation than the actual harm from the drugs themselves (Miron & Zwiebel, 1995).

Today, there is a growing recognition that a return to medical solutions such as opiate maintenance is a viable and promising al-

ternative to prohibitionist policies. Opiate maintenance programs in Canada and Europe have been shown to reduce crime, improve the health of addicts, and greatly reduce involvement with black markets for opiates (Blanken, et al., 2010; Lindesmith, 1947; Oviedo-Joekes, et al., 2009;; Uchtenhagen, 2010; Van den Brink, 2009). The Swiss program, allowing doctors to prescribe heroin, morphine, or methadone to addicts resulted in a 60 percent reduction in the number of criminal offenders; income from illegal activities of addicts fell from 69 percent to ten percent. At \$30 per patient per day, the net economic benefit to society was established through a cost-benefit analysis because of reduced criminal justice and health care costs (Nadelmann, 1998: 120). The US 'war on drugs' needs to end and be completely replaced by harm reduction and/or medical model of treatments. By decriminalizing personal drug possession and usage, and returning the treatment of drug addiction to our health care system instead of our criminal justice system, we can reduce the harm associated with drug usage and its associated costs (see Drucker, 1995; De Jarlais, 1995, Nadelmann, 1998).

4. Demilitarize the Criminal Justice System

Since the invention of the penitentiary in the 18th century, prisons in the United States and elsewhere in the world have been authoritarian regimes roughly organized on the police or military model. This model has been reflected in the uniforms and ranking of staff, and use of nomenclature such as 'superintendent', 'officer' and 'warden'. Even parole officers, although dressed in civilian clothing, in many states carry badges and firearms like police detectives. The military-type imagery of law enforcement is enhanced by the use of terms such as 'war on crime' and 'war on drugs', with the perpetrators thus depicted as the 'enemy'. The result is an occupational mindset based on fighting wars and vanquishing enemies. In such an atmosphere, containment and control easily take precedence over correction and rehabilitation.

We suggest that a new direction in US corrections might begin with changing the job titles of correctional ‘officer’ to correctional ‘worker’, and parole ‘officer’ to parole ‘worker’. These professional titles (like that of social worker) would ideally be accompanied by a college degree and a license. We see an upgrading of the professional status and competency of staff, together with a shedding of the authoritarian model, to be an important first step in effective prison reform.

5. End Punishment Packages

Some courts are now handing out multiple sentences in what Morris and Tonry (1990) have called “punishment packages,” that include both prison time as well as so-called “alternative” sentences. Initially, probation, restitution, fining and community service were intended as alternatives to incarceration. Community supervision (for example, probation or court ordered treatment for substance abuse) was developed as a means to divert minor or first-time offenders from prison. With the exception of fining and restitution, combining prison sentences with non-custodial sanctions defeats the meaning and purpose of the alternative remedy.

We recommend that apart from financial penalties, imprisonment and community-based alternatives should be mutually exclusive sentencing options meaning they should not be imposed at the same time. There should be an end to stacking or piling-on sanctions. Moreover, we suggest that restitution, fines, and court costs should only be imposed upon those with reasonable means of repayment. For those who cannot pay, some form of community service may be an option. Further, we suggest that court-ordered child support payments be suspended while a person is in jail or prison, unless the court can demonstrate that the prisoner has assets or income to pay the bills.

6. Restore Voting Rights to all Felons and Prisoners

Another matter that concerns Convict Criminologists is voting rights. The USA is one of the few advanced industrial countries that denies voting rights to most prisoners in jail (even before they are convicted of felonies) and to convicted felons in prison, on parole, or in some states for the rest of their life. If the government wishes prisoners to become responsible and contributing members of society, it should endow prisoners with the same democratic rights as other citizens. People do not lose their sense of fairness and justice just because they go to prison. Their life experiences are often unique and varied and their opinions and values are no less valid than those of any other person. Moreover, because law and order is often such a key component of election campaigns, the voice of the criminal is of critical significance. Criminals, generally, have a practical and realistic view of criminal justice issues, nurtured by years of personal experience. The enfranchisement of prisoners is thus a fundamental component of any society which calls itself “democratic”.

7. Close Old and Functionally Obsolete Prisons

Prison conditions have steadily deteriorated over the past 30 years, largely because of growing correctional populations, rising incarceration costs, ageing institutions, and a thinning of resources. Many American jurisdictions, struggling under the weight of heavy correctional population increases, have been forced to keep archaic institutions open in order to contain the burgeoning numbers. Prisoners in old penitentiaries may be forced to sleep two or even three to a cell, or on the floor along a tier. In most medium and minimum-security facilities, prisoners sleep in dormitories. Such conditions create huge management problems, with the result that up to 20 percent of the population of some institutions has to be kept in solitary confinement under administrative or punitive segregation. Here, with almost noth-

ing in the way of vocational or educational resources, they languish until their sentences expire (Austin, et al., 2001; Richards, 2008; Ross, 2008; Irwin, 2005).

Convict Criminologists oppose the warehousing of prisoners in old penitentiaries and reformatories without work or programs. Over many decades, the design and operation of these archaic “big house” prisons has dehumanized inmates and contributed to higher levels of intimidation, serious assault, and sexual predation than in newly constructed facilities. As is the case in many other advanced industrialized countries, a reduced prison population detained in smaller institutions could be accomplished by constructing or redesigning prison units. In small correctional facilities where prisoners are held in single-celled units of no more than 60 people, maintaining control and security is easier and the incidence of sexual predation is close to zero. New Zealand, along with a number of European countries, follows this model (see, e.g., Newbold, 2007).

Accordingly, we recommend that American correctional authorities work towards the replacement of “big house” prisons with smaller, more management-friendly facilities. Modern prisons should be divided into small, discrete, administrative units of about 60. Small-unit management provides staff with an opportunity to get to know the prisoners, their names, their needs and their ability for self-improvement. Having a collection of such units upon a single site allows for the development of a variety of larger industries and work programs for the development of the prisoners’ employment skills.

8. Restore Federally Funded Higher Education to All Prisons

All prisons should offer prisoners serving over one year the opportunity of accessing education programs appropriate to their competence and aptitude. These might involve courses taught inside the prison, or at nearby colleges. The federal government should underwrite tuition costs. Alternatively, states might consider a program that waives the

first year of tuition, or room and board, at state-supported schools and universities, for men and women just released from custody. The state would save money by assisting former prisoners to attend college, rather than having them living on welfare and returning to prison. It now costs, depending on the state and level of security, from \$15,000 to \$100,000 to keep one adult in a correctional facility for a year. For example, it might cost \$15,000 a year to keep a person in a minimum-security camp, while the expense for high-security or super-max solitary confinement might approach \$100,000 per year. If assisting prisoners into education helps them to get jobs, pay taxes, support their families, and avoid further imprisonment, the potential saving can be significant.

Federal funding might also be used to begin innovate college programs inside prisons. The important idea is that the federal government has a responsibility to help return college programming to prisons. For example, in Wisconsin, a program called “Inviting Convicts to College” has been in place since 2004, training pairs of undergraduate student intern instructors to go inside prisons to teach a free college course entitled “Convict Criminology” (Richards et al., 2006, 2008; Richards & Ross, 2007; Rose et al., 2010). The course uses the book *Convict Criminology*, donated by the publisher, to inspire the prisoners. Classes are taught two hours a week, for 14 weeks, and are supervised by ex-convict professors. Inmates exiting prison use the course as a bridge to entering college, with the final weeks including instruction on completing university admission and financial aid forms. The prisoners soon learn that admission to college and financial aid grants and loans can be a viable parole plan. The program has already helped a number of prisoners to enter universities, where they receive ongoing advice and mentoring from members of the CC group.

9. Properly Prepare Inmates Properly for Release

Preparation for release should begin the day a person enters prison and should intensify as his/her discharge date approaches. Prisoners should be processed from high to low-security levels as part of a carefully planned “staged release program.” This means a prisoner who enters a maximum-security prison (penitentiary), is always provided an opportunity to earn his or her way down the ladder to medium-security (correctional institution), then minimum-security “in custody” (prison camp), minimum-security “out custody” where he/she qualifies for home furloughs and release to work a job or attend college in the community during the day and return to prison camp at night.

In order to assist prisoner development, institutions need to invest in libraries, vocational and educational programs, social work services, and medical care. This requires increased funding, a commitment to helping prisoners, community co-operation, and a steady flow of information and feedback between the prisons and community corrections concerning conditions on the street. These programs should include liberal visitation privileges, home furloughs for well-behaved prisoners, and family and employment counseling.

All prisoners should have a detailed plan prepared by a dedicated release planner, before discharge. This may be a work-release or parole plan. The release planner should arrange for persons nearing release to obtain drivers’ licenses and social security cards. Prisoners with outstanding consumer or tax debt could receive legal counseling on filing for bankruptcy. The plan should include specific reference to family, place of residence and employment or school. Also, pre-release preparation may include escorted home visits for men to see their children and spouses or ex-spouses, if deemed safe and appropriate.

Another recommendation concerns the need for work-release facilities within or near prisons, operating with low supervision. Few work-release clients require the intensive supervision used in controlled movement facilities. We suggest that work-release centers currently operated by the federal government and non-profit agencies may

provide a model for the guidance of state correctional administrators contemplating such a move.

Irrespective of work-release, however, we urge that released prisoners should have enough “gate money” to provide for up to three months’ living expenses as a guard against financial desperation and relapse. All persons exiting correctional institutions should have clothing suitable for the climate and environment into which they are entering, and access to subsidies for work-related clothing and equipment expenses. Some of the costs involved could be recouped from prison wages, with the balance provided by the state.

Finally, all states should consider funding residential and counseling services administered, operated and staffed by ex-convicts who hold college degrees in social work, social science, or related subjects. Former prisoners know and understand the difficulties of leaving prison and reentering the community. Their expertise is an available resource rarely utilized and desperately needed if we are ever to make a dent in the rate of recidivism.

10. Improve Medical Services

We believe that providing proper medical care for persons in custody is a fundamental duty of the state. As things stand, one of the most terrifying scenarios is to be a prisoner in the USA with a serious illness. The standard of treatment for sickness and pain is generally poor, and there is much unwarranted suffering, sometimes leading to untimely death, within our penal institutions. We recommend that all prison medical care be regulated by independent qualified hospital staff, outside the command structure of corrections departments. We also recommend that prisoners with serious or terminal medical conditions be transferred to community hospitals, where they can receive better medical treatment, at reduced cost.

However, recognizing that prevention is better than cure, and that many entering prisons come from backgrounds of poverty with limited

access to medical services, we also recommend that all prisoners be provided with education in health and nutrition. By giving prisoners proper training in health, prison-related health care expenses could be reduced, and the health status of the prisoner would improve over the course of incarceration. Thus, it would be more likely to be maintained after release. Additionally, the adoption of a healthy lifestyle may lead to a reduction in criminal or drug-related activity and reduce recidivism (see Murphy, 2003; Murphy, 2005).

11. Provide Community Resource Centers (CRCs)

If we really want to help people coming out of prison, we need to provide for the likelihood of their success. When they are released, they should thus be free of petty or punitive parole supervision. This means not only a relief from intrusive scrutiny, but also the provision of appropriate professional services. Through a process of assisted decision-making, prisoners should be enabled to make responsible choices about the kinds of help—vocational, domestic, medical, drug and alcohol treatment—that they may need.

Accordingly, we suggest that probation and parole workers be assigned office space at well-equipped Community Resource Centers (CRC). The Resource Center would provide services to help people find jobs, get training, go to school, secure affordable housing, and readjust to family life. This deployment would serve the needs of both ex-convicts and the local community. These centers could serve a broad spectrum of people with fewer state or federal employees. Some resource workers might specialize in people coming out of jails or prisons, while others would focus on the disabled, homeless, or unemployed. These services would help offenders adjust to the ‘free world’, thus reducing their chances of returning to a life of crime.

12. Provide Residential Treatment Centers (RTCs)

The current punitive system of justice incarcerates offenders without addressing seriously the factors that led to the offending in the first place. The public demands that criminals be punished for their crimes, but for a correctional system to be effective, it must also alter criminal behavior patterns and mindsets. Drug-related crime presents a special challenge, because in this case, addictive precursors to criminal activity also have to be neutralized.

We encourage authorities to try to handle criminal and addictive activity in a new way: through state-run Residential Treatment Centers (RTCs). RTCs may operate as a substitute for imprisonment or as a means of reintegrating offenders serving long sentences toward the end of their terms. There are a number of ways of running RTCs, but the Delancey Street Foundation in San Francisco and its sister organization, the Salisbury Street Foundation in New Zealand, are possible models (see Hough, 2003; Newbold, 2007; Newbold and Hough, 2009). Generally, however, RTCs generally offer residential treatment of 12 months or more for selected offenders, within a system of graduating privilege and freedom. Residents are assisted into jobs and accommodation upon release, and receive ongoing support on an *ad hoc* basis once they are discharged. Organizations of this type are no ‘magic bullet’ for the problem of recidivism, but when properly operated and resourced they can have a significant impact on the post-prison lives of some offenders. Because RTCs are no more expensive to run than prison—in fact the larger centers are cheaper—they are a worthwhile investment for any jurisdiction serious about reducing reoffending.

We suggest different states might begin pilot programs where they convert one or more prisons into RTCs. The RTC would be staffed by more social workers, teachers, and health care workers, and fewer correctional officers. This would give the states large facilities where they could treat thousands of people at one time. They might also explore allowing free citizens to voluntarily request commitment as a

means to receive treatment for alcoholism, drug addiction, or other behavioral problems that may be associated with criminal offenses. People might ask for help because they know their problems will eventually lead to arrest. For example, people who drink and drive, or have become addicted to street drugs or doctor-prescribed medications, or have developed a pattern of losing their temper, would ask for treatment. The RTC would be operated to serve a diverse population of people, including those assigned by court, jail, or prison, as well as those who know they have a problem, and request admission, without any arrest or conviction.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have proposed a variety of policy recommendations for rethinking incarceration and the re-entry process in the USA. Our proposals have ranged from suggestions relating to sentencing, prison alternatives, changing the job orientations of correctional employees, improvements in the physical conditions of prisons, preparation of inmates for release, and finally to the availability of integrative programs and services for prisoners after readmission to the free world.

Nevertheless, due to time and space constraints, we have left a number of topics unaddressed. For example, we have been unable to discuss the experience of arrest, pre-trial lockup, and court processing in the US (see Ross & Richards, 2002, 1–46). Nor have we touched on the spoiled identity of felons perpetrated by on-line public access to criminal records in the US (Murphy, et al., 2010), the plight of ‘lifers’ in the prisons (Irwin, 2009), and many other topics. We suggest the reader might explore our publications on these subjects and others at the Convict Criminology website (<http://www.convictcriminology.org/>).

As Convict Criminologists we contend that it is a general failure of state agencies to address simple solutions that contribute to high incarceration, re-offending and reincarceration rates in the United States. In effect, state agencies have created a “perpetual incarceration machine” (Richards & Jones, 1997; 2004) that recycles the same people repeatedly through the same processes without improving their life-chances. In failing to adequately prepare prisoners for life after incarceration, the prison sets in motion a self-motivating cycle. Unless the traditional and popular notions about crime and punishment which form the basis of the existing system are questioned, meaningful change will not be possible. In our view, if the taken-for-granted is not contested to the point where state agencies become ready to rise to the challenge of finding pragmatic solutions, recidivism will remain at its currently high levels and the prison system will continue to replicate its record of dismal underachievement and failure.

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